
The Triennial Comprehensive Report on Immigration

Part IV

State Impacts

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Immigrants in Selected States

Most of the discussion in this Triennial Report has treated immigration at the national level: the volume of immigration nationwide, the contribution of immigration to total population growth, the impact of immigrants on the labor force, the extent to which immigrants participate in social service programs, and the cost of these services to the extent known. This is a necessary first approach to assessing the impact of immigration on the United States. Beyond this aspect, a full understanding of the topic requires consideration of the effects of immigration as they are experienced at the State and local level. Data on the social and economic characteristics of the foreign-born population are collected for small geographic areas in the decennial Census. This chapter presents data on that population for the seven States with the largest foreign-born populations in 1990. A review of the immigrants' characteristics at that time begins to indicate the likely nature of their impact on the communities in which they settle.

The seven States selected for this presentation are California, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and Texas. They contain the largest numbers of persons who arrived in the 1980's as well as the largest total foreign-born populations. In 1990, they contained 41.4 percent of the total U.S. population, but they accounted for 75.8 percent of the foreign-born population and 78.5 percent of those who had arrived during the previous decade. Table 1 repeats the basic information from the 1990 Census on the foreign-born population in those States.

TABLE 1.—Total and Foreign-Born Population for the Seven States (Thousands)

	1990 Census					
		Foreign-Born Population			1980 Census Total Population	Total Population Change 1980-90
State	Total Population	Number	Percent	Entered 1980-90		
U.S. Total	248,718	19,767	7.9%	8,664	226,546	22,173
California	29,758	6,459	21.7%	3,256	23,668	6,090
New York	17,991	2,852	15.9%	1,190	17,558	433
Florida	12,938	1,663	12.9%	660	9,746	3,192
Texas	16,986	1,524	9.0%	718	14,229	2,757
New Jersey	7,730	967	12.5%	385	7,365	365
Illinois	11,431	952	8.3%	371	11,427	4
Massachusetts	6,016	574	9.5%	223	5,737	279
Balance of U.S.	145,868	4,776	3.3%	1,861	136,816	9,053
Seven States as percent of total	41.4%	75.8%		78.5%		

Source: Chapter 2, Table 1.

The analysis contributed by the Census Bureau in Chapter 2, Immigration and Population Change in the United States, indicates that the effect of immigration on the population growth of States is not distributed equally, and these States illustrate the point. Those in the Sun Belt (California, Florida, and Texas) grew rapidly during the 1980's, and arrivals from abroad were an important component of that growth. The other four States grew slowly or hardly at all, and Illinois, New Jersey, and New York would have experienced net losses in population if not for immigration. In most other States, the number of foreign-born persons and their proportion in the population is considerably smaller than in these seven. (In 1990, 14.7 percent of Hawaii's population consisted of foreign-born persons; however, this number represented relatively few persons compared with the seven States selected for this discussion. No other State's foreign-born population reached even 10 percent.) The impact of immigration—even at low levels—on a State with a small population can be significant, but in general, the greatest impact is felt where the largest number of foreign-born persons reside.

The material reviewed in the previous chapters has demonstrated the considerable diversity to be found within the immigrant population. The United States provides a great variety of contexts into which immigrants may settle, and immigrants with varying skills find appropriate places to live according to where their talents and resources are in demand. Often they settle among people who came earlier from the same country or the same part of the world, and who help the newer arrivals find jobs and places to live. Ethnic enclaves are created and grow in a way that can have a distinct impact on their communities once they reach a certain size. The characteristics of the immigrants living in a community will help to determine the nature of their impact. Because of the way immigrant communities grow, these characteristics are not distributed evenly.

In the important area of employment, foreign-born persons enumerated in the 1990 Census had a labor force participation rate of 64.3 percent, compared with 65.4 percent for the native-born population. In four of the seven selected States (Illinois, New Jersey, California, and Texas), the labor force participation rate of the foreign-born population was higher than the 64.3 percent average, while it was lower in Florida, Massachusetts, New York, and the balance of the United States. The unemployment rate among the foreign-born population was higher than the national average of 7.8 percent in Texas, California, Massachusetts, and New York, while it was lower in the other three States and in the balance of the country. The apparent paradox of a high unemployment rate coexisting with a high labor force participation rate in California and Texas indicates that many foreign-born persons residing there were actively seeking work but were not employed at the time of the census. This information is summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2.—Labor Force Participation Rate and Unemployment Rate for Foreign-Born Persons Aged 16 and Over in the United States and Selected States: 1990

Rate	State								Balance of U.S.
	Total U.S.	CA	FL	IL	MA	NJ	NY	TX	
Labor force participation rate ¹	64.3%	66.8%	60.9%	67.9%	62.3%	67.5%	62.7%	65.1%	61.7%
Unemployment rate (civilian)	7.8%	8.9%	7.4%	7.0%	8.4%	6.8%	8.1%	9.4%	6.0%

Source: Calculated by INS from U.S. Census Bureau, *Census of Population and Housing, 1990: SSTF 1*.

¹Includes persons serving in the Armed Forces.

Some of these differences in the labor force participation and employment patterns of immigrants may lie in the differing qualifications they bring to the labor markets in the places where they settle. The amount of formal education presented by foreign-born persons living in the different States varies greatly, as shown in Table 3. The national average of immigrants who have less than a 9th grade education is 26.3 percent. This figure is considerably higher in Texas (43.1 percent) and California (31.3 percent) and slightly higher in Illinois (28.0 percent). In the other large States immigrants were less likely to have only a grade school education than the national average, and the figure for the small States comprising the balance of the United States was the most favorable, at 20.1 percent.

TABLE 3.—Educational Attainment of the Foreign-Born Population Aged 25 and Over in the United States and Selected States: 1990

Education Level	State								Balance of U.S.
	Total U.S.	CA	FL	IL	MA	NJ	NY	TX	
Percent with education of:									
Less than 9 th grade:	26.3	31.3	22.3	28.0	26.1	21.5	22.1	43.1	20.1
At least high school:	58.8	53.8	59.4	58.3	59.0	64.1	60.9	43.3	66.7
College degree or more:	20.4	18.4	15.4	21.3	21.9	24.5	19.6	15.2	25.2

Source: Calculated by INS from U.S. Census Bureau, *Census of Population and Housing, 1990: SSTF 1*.

The statistical profile for the States of residence of the best educated immigrants is consistent with the distribution of those with the least amount of education. In the country as a whole, 20.4 percent of the foreign-born persons enumerated in 1990 had a college degree or an even higher level of education. The percentage for most of the seven large States was below that level or slightly above it, with Texas being the lowest at 15.2 percent. New Jersey had the highest proportion of well-educated immigrants, with 24.5 percent, and in the balance of the country, 25.2 percent of the immigrants had at least a college education.

These differences in the education levels of foreign-born persons are generally reflected in their income levels by State, as shown in Table 4. Nationwide, the per capita income level of immigrants as measured in the 1990 Census was \$15,033. Texas, California, and Florida had the lowest per capita income of foreign-born persons in the large States, at \$10,537, \$13,596, and \$14,119 respectively. Per capita income was highest among the large States in New Jersey, at \$19,995. The picture differs slightly when household income is used as the measure. The median household income of foreign-born persons nationwide was \$28,320, and the median in Texas was the lowest at \$19,537. Household income was also low in Florida at \$24,010, but the median household income in California was above the national figure, at \$30,333. This indicates a larger than average household size among immigrants in California. New Jersey again showed the highest income level at \$37,628. Consistently, New Jersey was only half as likely as the national average to have foreign-born persons or families with incomes below the poverty level. In Texas, 32.2 percent of foreign-born persons and 30.5 percent of their families were living in poverty, compared with the national averages of 18.2 percent and 14.9 percent. Immigrants in California were slightly more likely to have poverty-level incomes than the national average.

A tabulation of the sources of household income of the foreign-born population as reported in the 1990 Census provides some insight into these income differentials by State. Nationwide, 81.7 percent of all households headed by immigrants reported having income from earnings (which could be wages from salaried employment or self-employment or both). In Texas and California, 88.5 percent and 86.1 percent respectively had income from earnings, indicating that the lower average incomes observed there were not because of a lack of employment. Relatively few immigrant households in Texas and California received Social Security or retirement income, consistent with the picture of a young, employed population. Florida and Massachusetts had the highest percentage of immigrant households receiving Social Security or retirement income.

TABLE 4.—Measures of Income and Poverty of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States and Selected States: 1990

Characteristic	State								Balance of U.S.
	Total U.S.	CA	FL	IL	MA	NJ	NY	TX	
Income:									
Per capita	\$15,033	\$13,596	\$14,119	\$16,764	\$16,844	\$19,995	\$17,026	\$10,537	\$16,264
Median household ¹	\$28,320	\$30,333	\$24,010	\$31,667	\$30,514	\$37,628	\$29,668	\$19,537	N/A
Households (%):									
<\$5,000	7.1	5.5	11.2	6.0	6.7	4.5	7.4	11.5	7.5
\$75,000+	10.5	11.1	6.8	10.6	11.2	16.8	11.8	5.0	10.6
Income below poverty level (%):									
Persons	18.2	20.0	15.6	13.6	13.9	9.2	15.9	32.2	16.9
Families	14.9	16.4	13.8	10.4	10.0	7.0	13.4	30.5	12.3
Households with (%):									
Earnings	81.7	86.1	75.6	84.2	76.2	83.7	78.6	88.5	78.9
Social Security income	21.6	15.3	29.3	21.0	28.8	23.3	24.5	13.1	25.4
Public assistance income	9.1	12.1	8.7	5.7	10.2	5.7	10.1	10.0	6.4
Retirement income	10.3	8.3	11.8	9.1	12.2	11.0	10.8	4.9	13.1

Source: Calculated by INS from U.S. Census Bureau, *Census of Population and Housing, 1990: SSTF 1*.

¹The Census Bureau defines a household as "foreign-born" if the householder or reference person is foreign born.

Nationwide, 9.1 percent of immigrant households were reported in the Census to be receiving income from public assistance programs, which could include Aid to Families with Dependent Children, General Assistance, or Supplemental Security Income (but not food stamps or Medicaid). In California, fully 12.1 percent of such households reported receiving this type of assistance, the highest of the large States. Use of public assistance at the rate of 10 percent or higher was also reported by households in Massachusetts, New York, and Texas. Reliance on these public programs was lowest in Illinois and New Jersey, at 5.7 percent, and was only 6.4 percent in the smaller States represented by the balance of the United States.

An important aspect of the impact of immigration on local communities is its impact on schools. Immigrant children and children born into immigrant families need classroom space, and depending on their language ability and their level of preparation, they may need special services before entering into the ongoing instructional program. Table 5 summarizes the information available from the Census that might provide a measure of the impact of immigration on the schools in the selected States.

Nationwide, 6.4 percent of children aged 5 to 17 and reported in the Census to be enrolled in either public or private school were born outside the United States. In California, the proportion was nearly three times as large, at 18.8 percent; New York was second among the large States at 11.8 percent. Outside the seven large States, only 2.6 percent of school enrollment consisted of foreign-born children. These figures document a large imbalance in the impact of immigration on the schools, and disaggregation of the data below the State level would no doubt show even greater contrasts at the level of the community and the school district.

Not all immigrant children are limited in their English ability, particularly after several years in the United States, and not all native-born children are fluent English speakers. The proportion of school enrollment that is limited in English ability, without regard to place of birth, generally follows the same pattern as the proportion of the foreign-born population but at a slightly lower level (see Table 5). The exception is Texas, where 7.1 percent of the school enrollment is foreign-born persons, and 11.9 percent is limited in English ability. The school enrollment percentage of both foreign-born persons and those limited in English ability is rather small nationwide (1.9 percent), but it is 7.5 percent in California. The contrast with the small States that make up the balance of the United States is substantial; in those States, only 0.6 percent of school enrollment is foreign born and limited in English ability.

This review of a few immigrant characteristics as they were distributed in 1990 among seven major States indicates one reason why no consensus exists regarding the impact of immigration: It varies in different locations, depending in part on the characteristics of the immigrants. For example, in California and Texas, the immigrant population has relatively little formal education and a higher than average unemployment rate. Despite immigrants in those two States being more likely to participate in the labor force and earn incomes than the national average, they are also more likely to be living in poverty and collecting public assistance payments. Schools in these States have a disproportionate enrollment of students whose English ability is limited. With these indicators, the impression of the impact of immigration gained from looking only at California and Texas is likely to be negative.

The impression from analyzing the immigrant population in a State such as New Jersey is entirely different. There, one-fourth of the adult immigrants have at least a college degree. Their labor force participation is high, and their unemployment is low. They are only half as likely to be in poverty as the average immigrant, and few receive public assistance. At 6.4 percent, the proportion of New Jersey's school enrollment that is limited in English ability is slightly higher than the national average of 5.6 percent. Overall, immigration appears in a favorable light if the judgment is based on the characteristics of immigrants living in New Jersey. In most of the small States, as shown in the Balance of the United States column in these tables, the characteristics of the immigrant population are more like those in New Jersey than those in California or Texas, and the numbers and proportion of the population are much smaller. The impact of immigration in most of the United States, then, is likely to be negligible and perceived as favorable to the extent that it is an issue.

TABLE 5.—School Enrollment and English Language Ability¹ of Persons Aged 5 to 17 in the United States and Selected States: 1990

Characteristic	Total U.S.	State							Balance of U.S.
		CA	FL	IL	MA	NJ	NY	TX	
Percentage of school enrollment that is foreign-born and limited in English ability:	1.9	7.5	2.4	1.7	2.1	2.1	2.9	2.5	0.6
Percentage of school enrollment that is limited in English ability:	5.6	15.3	6.0	5.2	5.8	6.4	8.6	11.9	2.4
Percentage of school enrollment that are foreign-born persons	6.4	18.8	9.9	5.9	7.4	8.7	11.8	7.1	2.6
Percentage of college enrollment that are foreign-born persons (of any age):	10.8	24.2	16.2	10.4	11.8	14.9	19.0	10.7	5.4

Source: Calculated by INS from U.S. Census Bureau, *Census of Population and Housing, 1990: SSTF 1*.

¹School enrollment figures cover all persons reported in the 1990 Census to be enrolled in elementary or high schools. College students may be of any age. Having limited English ability is defined as living in a home where a language other than English is spoken and not speaking English "very well."